

ADDRESS

DELIVERED ON THE 100th ANNIVERSARY OF THE

Battle of Fort Washington

ST. PAUL'S CHAPEL, TRINITY PARISH, NEW YORK

By Rev. WM. MONTAGUE GREER, S. T. D., Vicar

For Fort Washington Chapter
Daughters of the American Revolution



THE CLERICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE

1911

Ex Libris

SEYMOUR DURST

t' Fort nieuw Amsterdam op de Manhatans



FORT NEW AMSTERDAM



(NEW YORK), 1651

*When you leave, please leave this book
Because it has been said
"Ever'thing comes t' him who waits
Except a loaned book."*

AVERY ARCHITECTURAL AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY

GIFT OF SEYMOUR B. DURST OLD YORK LIBRARY

R. C. BALLARD THURSTON.

ADDRESS

DELIVERED ON THE 138TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE

Battle of Fort Washington

AT

ST. PAUL'S CHAPEL, TRINITY PARISH, NEW YORK

BY REV. WM. MONTAGUE GEER, S.T.D., VICAR

For Fort Washington Chapter

Daughters of the American Revolution



THE FANWOOD PRESS.

1914

OYL 9083 BOX 51

D.P. 511E

F

241

WSS

1914

1914

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2013

ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS.



MEMBERS of the Fort Washington Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, you are most welcome in St. Paul's Chapel for the celebration of the one hundred and thirty-eighth anniversary of the Battle of Fort Washington. This Chapel ought to, and doubtless does, seem like home to you, because in yonder pew, as you know, George Washington worshipped from 1789 to 1791, of which the tale is told very briefly in his diary in his own handwriting as regularly as Sunday came round, "Went to St. Paul's Chapel in the forenoon;" and, immediately after his inauguration as First President of the United States, on April 30, 1789, George Washington, with both Houses of Congress, came in procession to this Chapel, where an appropriate Service was held by Bishop Provoost, Chaplain of the Senate, and a solemn *Te Deum* was sung.

There is one other important reason why your Chapter should feel at home in St. Paul's Chapel. This is the neighborhood in which the buildings stood where so many of the prisoners, taken captive in the Battle of Fort Washington, suffered the tortures of most cruel imprisonment—the long, low,

two-story structure, which stood in what is now City Hall Park, near Murray Street, the Sugar House on what is now Liberty Street, and the Middle Dutch Church on the corner of Cedar and Nassau Streets. Here are the streets on which the feet of those heroes might have walked to freedom, if they had been willing to save their lives, which they were not willing to do, by enlisting under the British flag; and the ringing of the bell of this Chapel must often have been heard by those prisoners, reminding them, in their dreadful captivity, of God, of Christ, of liberty, and of home. There is a sense then, in which the vicinity of St. Paul's Chapel, put now to strange and interesting, if not always inspiring, uses, to you should be holy ground.

The time limitations of a service held here at mid-day are such that it will be impossible to give any detailed account of the Battle of Fort Washington; but details are not called for in this presence, because they are probably more familiar to you than those of any other of the chief battles of the Revolution. But by way of reminder, and for the benefit of others who are present and welcome at this Service, some mention should be made of the most important facts.

The Battle of Fort Washington was preceded by some of the gloomiest hours of the Revolution. It marked the darkest day of American History, the midnight of American Liberty; and the rising of the day-star of hope in the hearts of the Colonists

seemed indeed far away. The Fort had been constructed most carefully and with great skill. It was manned by not far from three thousand soldiers, and the duty of this little army was to keep the enemy from taking possession of Manhattan Island. Noble and heroic was the struggle that was made in defense of the fort. But, well aware of the importance of the position, Sir William Howe (as history tells us) "attacked the fort with the strongest army which up to that time had ever left the shores of Great Britain, while the soldiers in the fort consisted, with the exception of the Maryland Regiment, mostly of untrained farmers, poorly supplied, and serving practically without pay." This army had suffered from mutiny among its junior commissioned officers, from desertions and treachery, shameful waste of provisions, deplorable inattention in some camps to decency and cleanliness ; but history also tells us that "these were the small shadows on a broad picture of unselfish devotion to duty, and that no more heroic devotion has ever been recorded than that exhibited by these plain enlisted soldiers and militiamen." It was, however, the will of the God of battles that, one hundred and thirty-eight years ago to-day, those three thousand troops under Magaw, one of the greatest heroes of the Revolution, after doing all that lay in the power of men to do, surrendered to overwhelming numbers of the enemy ; but not until five hundred Hessians had bought the victory with their lives, and defense was no longer possible. Prisoners of war they were

called, but really, as the writer says, "they were executed, most of them by slow torture on the English ships; and so the blackest page in English History was written." But Americans under Washington were on guard during those midnight hours. Their diminished army was chased by the enemy from the Hudson to the Delaware, and across the Delaware to Pennsylvania; but shortly afterward they appeared before the British at Trenton and won a great victory, taking one thousand English soldiers prisoners of war. Seven days later Washington attacked Princeton and won the day, defeating Cornwallis, capturing many prisoners. Then followed Saratoga in a few months, and the downfall of Burgoyne. After that came the winter at Valley Forge, followed with alternate defeat and victory by Camden, King's Mountain, Eutaw Springs, and finally Yorktown. "The news" (in the words of the historian) "was sent by swift messengers to every corner of the American nation which had just been born; it was carried as fast as horse and rider could go—the news that America was free." If the brave soldiers in Fort Mifflin had only known it, how comforted they would have been by the cry, "It is indeed midnight but all is well!" for all was in the hand of God, who was on his throne of love and power. Proud, indeed, ought the descendants of such men to be.

Time must be cruelly economized in order that two facts of interest to us to-day may not be ignored or forgotten. We are

thinking and talking in the House of God, of the heroism of American soldiers one hundred and thirty-eight years ago, while, incredible as it may seem and appalling as it certainly is, the greatest war the world has ever known is raging among the Nations of Europe. We are talking in this House of God about the Battle of Fort Washington, while the only real world-war the world has ever known is in progress on the other side of the water. Let us give some thought to these facts, because it surely must be true that, since God is "nearer to us than breathing, closer than hands and feet," we cannot think of him as not sustaining a most intimate relation to battles fought by his children, who are losing their lives by hundreds of thousands. The present war is on too colossal a scale to admit of the Moral Governor of the universe being eliminated from it in our thoughts.

Time-limitations make it impossible to do more than submit a few general principles, which call loudly but in vain for elaboration. First—The war-gate is God's private entrance into national life which man cannot close, not even with the aid of peace-conferences, multiplied treaties, Hague-tribunals, and peace-banquets at the Waldorf-Astoria at ten dollars a plate. Nor is what Chesterton well calls "plutocratic pomposity" of the slightest value in matters of such high importance.

If the antithesis of war were peace and simple old-fashioned living, with the husband and father at the plough, the wife

and mother at the spindle, and the children morally and spiritually cared for ; and if these condition prevailed all over the world, it would be well nigh impossible to pass from peace to war. But in these days this is not at all the kind of peace which is the opposite of military warfare. There are many kinds of antitheses of military warfare. One goes by the name of peace, but is really industrial warfare, which has its own ways of making widows and orphans, necessitating child-labor, manufacturing multi-millionaires in large numbers, increasing the army of the unemployed and of underpaid women and girls, many of whom are forced to choose between starvation and immorality. These evils are easily stated, but it is difficult to see how they can be remedied, for no dependence can be placed upon socialism, which would only make matters worse than they are. But what we are interested in, in considering in the House of God the subject of war, is the fact that it is easy to pass from a state of industrial warfare, full of such abominations, to a state of military warfare, which after all is only full of other kinds of abominations, without God showing Himself specially interested to prevent man having his own way in the matter.

This becomes clearer to our minds, I think, when we remember that God cannot be greatly moved by the fact that men die on the battlefield, by the thousand or hundreds of thousands, because men are dying all the time by His fiat, and leaving

widows and orphans behind them ; and no man dies on the battle-field who would have escaped death if there had been no fighting. And when among the other real opposites of war you find luxury and extravagance, also the results of industrial warfare, leading on to greater and greater moral laxity, expressing itself in an increasing number of divorces, in immoral fiction and a corrupt drama, it becomes still easier to believe that God is not as interested as well-to-do men, who have staked their all on peace, wish He were in preserving peace among the nations. The artist Leighton goes so far as to say that "the arts of luxury are more deadly than the arts of war." The case becomes clearer still when we find that the religion of the Incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world, is being more and more dispensed with and pushed one side, in all the strata of intellectual life, from our colleges and universities down to our de-Christianized Public Schools, and in all the strata of social and industrial life, from our multi-millionaires (some of them possessors of hundreds of millions of dollars), down to the unemployed classes, perhaps the saddest men in God's world to-day, whose numbers seem to be daily on the increase. If time permitted, more light could be thrown on what we have reason to believe is God's evident willingness that man should put a torch to a kind of civilization which man himself had made, and which is in very serious measure wholly unacceptable to God ; and that is just what is going on in Europe at this moment, for

we are plainly told that God is a jealous God, that He is "a consuming fire." Well may we cry, "O God, wherefore art Thou absent from us so long; why is Thy wrath so hot against the sheep of Thy pasture?" "Look upon the covenant; for all the earth is full of darkness and cruel habitations."

And there is another ignored or forgotten principle. It seems natural for man to think that the farther away in time we move from the Cross of Jesus Christ, the safer we are in turning our backs upon it; but surely exactly the opposite of this must be true. The farther away we move in time from Calvary and the Open Tomb, the more is expected from us in heartfelt devotion to His religion; and it is because the nations have been giving less and less instead of more and more devotion, that they are to-day suffering, as Cardinal Farley I believe truly says, from Divine Vengeance; because no real, safe and continuous progress is possible, independently of the religion of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Shortly before the war I heard some one say, "It seems as if we are on the edge of great things;" and we were, but not the great things the speaker had in mind, which were communicating with the alleged inhabitants of Mars, and with departed spirits, together with other marvels; whereas, the great things we proved to be on the edge of were the most appalling sorrows the world has ever known. Our pride, like the pride of the builders of the Tower of Babel, had to have a fall; and it is safe to prophesy

that if what are called civilization and culture are restored to the world by the labors of man in the year two thousand, and if they are at that time as independent of the religion of Jesus Christ as they are to-day, the Divine Vengeance will fall more heavily upon the world than it is falling now. It ought to be far more evident than it is that the very nature of God, as revealed to us in both the Old and New Testaments, is, under certain conditions, to be a God of peace ; and it is equally His nature, under other conditions, to be a God of war, "at whose word the stormy wind ariseth." Men are too apt to carry themselves, like the sailors written of in the Acts of the Apostles, as if the south wind would always blow softly, instead of preparing for the tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon, which is now upon us. To try to avoid war with an exceedingly undeveloped idea of God's relation to war is to invite war. All nations should be wedded to peace, "not unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God," lest the marriage degenerate into divorce, which is descriptive of European conditions to-day.

But it may be asked, Why take time at this Service for such a line of thought as this? Let me give two reasons in conclusion. The first is that warning may again be uttered that our conditions in this country are not such as to inspire confidence that we can depend upon God to save us from the same kind of sorrows which the European nations are bear-

ing, or, not impossibly, greater sorrows. Are we exalting the religion of Jesus Christ in this country? We certainly are not; and there are many other most unfavorable conditions, too numerous to mention now. They are perfectly familiar to you, and we have reason to believe that they are wholly unacceptable to God; for nations as well as individuals, as is again being proved to us, can be brought for judgment to the bar of Divine justice.

The second reason is because these facts and principles about God's relation to war help to give wise emphasis to the desirability of maintaining such organizations as the Daughters of the American Revolution. The saints who stand highest on your calendar are those mentioned in the eleventh Chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the thirty-fourth verse, who "quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong (as our American soldiers were after the defeat at Fort Washington), waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." How thankful we ought to be that soldiers are numbered among the Saints of God in that wonderful Chapter! These are not the times when we can afford to allow the soldier-spirit to die out of the hearts of our young men; although it has been seriously proposed that the subject of wars shall be taken out of our school books, and the sport of firing off firecrackers shall be forbidden to boys, lest the love of war be bred within them.

The opposite of the soldier-spirit is far too apt to be effeminacy, love of luxury, intemperance and immorality. Some soldiers may indeed make a bad record for intemperance and immorality, but the evil terminates with themselves and often with death. In civil life, intemperance and immorality exert a most corrupting influence over the young life of the nation.

And lastly, as a nation we are set in the midst of so many and great dangers, although we are disposed to think we are not, that while we love our neighbor we must not only not tear down our fences; we must make them strong for self-protection, far stronger than they are now. Evidently these are days when seemingly impossible things take place; and we cannot tell what God has in store for our country. The great Oriental Nations have yet to express themselves, they have yet to demand "their place in the sun," and to back their demands with overwhelming numbers. What that may mean to us, in the future near or remote, God only knows; but to belittle the honorable office of the soldier and not to give both soldiers and sailors, in proportion to our wealth, full advantage of all that modern science offers them, in the way of a reasonably full equipment for offensive and defensive action, seems to be un wisdom raised to a high degree.

For these and other good reasons, therefore, Daughters of the American Revolution, you, like all similar organizations which have held Services in St. Paul's Chapel (I close as I began), are most welcome here, and the benediction of God in Christ Jesus

our Lord is most fervently invoked upon you and upon all patriotic Societies.

On behalf of those heroes of the American Revolution now in the Paradise of God whose descendants you are, we are glad to offer the prayer : " Let light everlasting shine upon them, O Lord, and grant unto them eternal rest ; " and give us, we beseech Thee, their love of country, their devotion to duty. We ask all in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.





